

Saul Bass

American, 1920–1996

Anatomy of a Murder poster

1959

Lithograph mounted on canvas

41 x 27 in. (104.1 x 68.6 cm)

Gift of Jeff Galipeaux, 2000

Juliet Clark on **Anatomy of a Murder** poster

A dismembered cartoon figure is splayed on a slab of color, like the negative of a Matisse cut-out dropped onto a Rothkoid stack of rectangles. The anonymous body is titled and appended with names: the director Otto Preminger's possessive in artfully rough capitals; the cast marching down the block below in a clean outline typeface, their human faces conspicuously absent. Below the small-print production credits, alone between two arrows, Duke Ellington. But among all these names there's only one signature, discreet but distinct along the vertical edge: *Saul Bass*.

Bass made the title sequence for the film, too, and it follows the same outline but in black and white. On the screen, body parts assemble and fall away in sync with the rhythm of the Ellington score—identity design as a form of synesthesia. “I like the hand of the designer to show,” Bass said,¹ and the limbs you see here have his fingerprints all over them. He said he wanted to put the business of branding movies on the plane of metaphor, even metaphysics.² In his collaborations with Preminger, Bass may have out-auteured the auteur. When you see the ad the movie has already started.

Juliet Clark is a writer and editor specializing in film, art, and cultural history. She lives in El Cerrito, California.

